



## Interview Summary: Paul Leschied

Mr. Leschied was interviewed by Alexandra Heine and Allison McMahon on October 4, 2022. Questions about this witness summary should be directed to Ms. McMahon.

Following the interview, Commission Counsel identified maps depicting the geography described by Mr. Leschied. In reviewing the summary, Mr. Leschied reviewed the maps and confirmed they accurately depict the area he was describing. The maps are attached as Appendices A-D to this summary.

Text contained in [square brackets] are explanatory notes provided by Commission Counsel to assist the reader.

## Background

Mr. Leschied resides in McGregor, Ontario, located approximately 15 kilometers from downtown Windsor. He attended the protest that occurred at the Ambassador Bridge port of entry ("**POE**") in Windsor, Ontario on each night between February 7-11, 2022.

## Involvement in Past Protests

Mr. Leschied explained that in the last two years, he became involved in freedom demonstrations in Essex County due to a growing concern about the COVID-19 public health measures and their impacts on the rights and freedoms of Canadians. He also attended fundraisers to support people who received fines, were involved in legal proceedings, or faced financial hardship due to public health measures. Through his involvement in these events, Mr. Leschied became friends with individuals who share his concerns about rights infringements.

Mr. Leschied stated that he hears about freedom demonstrations through these friends, and he heard about the protest at the Ambassador Bridge through them.

## Involvement in the Ambassador Bridge Protest

### *Geography of the Ambassador Bridge*

Mr. Leschied explained that the main entrance to and exit from the Ambassador Bridge POE is on Huron Church Road, which is a six-lane road that runs north-south and connects the POE to Highway 401. Vehicles enter the POE travelling north on Huron Church Road and exit travelling south. Vehicles can also enter (but not exit) the POE using Wyandotte St. West.



[A map depicting the Ambassador Bridge POE and the surrounding area is attached as **Appendix “A”**.]

### *Slow Roll Protests*

Mr. Leschied noted that in the weeks leading up to the protests at the Ambassador Bridge, several “slow roll” protests occurred along Huron Church Road. Mr. Leschied stated that he did not participate in any of the slow roll protests but saw pictures of them through friends.

### *Monday, February 7, 2022*

Mr. Leschied explained that sometime in the afternoon of February 7, he received text messages from friends informing him that some cars and protesters were gathering on Huron Church Road near the Ambassador Bridge and blocking the street. Mr. Leschied was not aware of a plan to blockade the Ambassador Bridge in advance of February 7 and does not know who organized it.

Mr. Leschied attended the protest at approximately 9:00 p.m. that evening. As he explained, he has children and so he only attended the protest after they were ready for bed.

Mr. Leschied explained that he was motivated to attend the protest because he is skeptical of mainstream media and wanted a firsthand account of what was happening. He also had friends there and wanted to make sure that they would be safe. He felt that he would be a calming presence.

On arrival, Mr. Leschied observed approximately 3 to 4 vehicles parked perpendicular to the road on Huron Church Road. The vehicles blocked the three northbound and three southbound lanes at Girardot St. [Girardot St. is one block south of the POE entry on Huron Church Road.] There were approximately 30 to 40 protesters present. Mr. Leschied said he only recognized one or two people, which he found strange.

Mr. Leschied explained that the truck drivers involved in the blockade were young males in their twenties or thirties. They drove large pickup trucks with Ontario plates. Some of the trucks had trailers attached, and some carried had signage with anti-lockdown or freedom-oriented messages. Mr. Leschied’s impression was that the commercial trucks stuck on Huron Church Road at the time had not planned to participate in the protest, but happened to be present.

The protest caused traffic to back up to and from the Ambassador Bridge. At one point, a semitruck driver told the demonstrators that he needed to get through because he was diabetic. The demonstrators moved their vehicles to allow him to pass.



Mr. Leschied stated that there was a heavy Windsor Police Service (“**WPS**”) presence at the protest; he estimated that there were more police than protesters that night. Police cruisers were blocking the other intersections along Huron Church.

Mr. Leschied also recalled that he saw AMPM tow trucks stationed in the parking lot at Assumption High School [located at the intersection of Huron Church Rd. and Girardot St.] near the police cruisers. He explained that AMPM is a local tow truck company that he is familiar with because of his work in contracting. Mr. Leschied assumed that the tow trucks had been called by police to help clear the blockade. However, the police did not try to move the protesters out of the area, and he did not see any attempt by the tow trucks to move vehicles.

Mr. Leschied said he departed the protest area sometime between midnight and 1:00 a.m. By that time, approximately 12 protesters and three or four vehicles remained on site. Mr. Leschied assumed that the protest was a one-off event and that the intersection of Girardot St. and Huron Church Road would be clear by morning. He felt that there were not enough protesters there to block the street overnight, especially considering the number of police on site.

[A map depicting the location of the protesters, the police, and the AMPM tow trucks on February 7 is attached as **Appendix “B”**.]

*Tuesday, February 8, 2022*

On the morning of February 8, Mr. Leschied learned that the blockade was ongoing through mainstream media reports and texts from friends.

Mr. Leschied attended the protest again that evening around 9:00 p.m. He found that the vehicles and protesters who were there on February 7 had moved north to the intersection of Huron Church and College St., which is at the foot of the Ambassador Bridge [near the McDonald's]. All three southbound lanes on Huron Church Road between the POE exit and College St. were blocked. The protesters left one lane south of College St. open for emergency vehicles.

The protesters did not blockade the northbound lanes on Huron Church. However, those lanes were barricaded by police.

Mr. Leschied described how the new location of the protesters impeded traffic at the POE. The position of the protesters on the first night allowed traffic to exit the Ambassador Bridge POE onto Huron Church Road and use College St. The new location of the protesters blocked the Huron Church Road exit directly.



Mr. Leschied heard from other protesters that the police agreed to allow them to relocate to College St. He explained that he believed this to be true because the protester vehicles would have had to travel through intersections that were heavily policed and barricaded, and doing so would have required police cooperation. Mr. Leschied stated that he was surprised that the police agreed to give up the “higher ground” to protesters.

Police were walking through the intersection and engaging in cordial conversations with protesters. Cruisers and wooden barricades were stationed along the cross streets, but police permitted protester vehicles to come and go from the protest site. At midnight, two protester trucks arrived onsite. They were travelling northbound. The police moved their cruisers and barricades to allow those trucks to park with the other protesters in the southbound lanes of Huron Church Road. Mr. Leschied said he saw the police officers helping these vehicles.

There were approximately 200 people and 30 vehicles in attendance on the second night. Protesters brought barbecues, shared food, played music, and sang the national anthem. Mr. Leschied understands that there were more people there during the daytime, including children.

[A map depicting the location of the protesters and the police on February 8 is attached as **Appendix “C”**.]

*Wednesday, February 9, 2022*

Mr. Leschied attended the protest again the following evening around 9:00 p.m. He parked far away from the intersection and walked in.

The protest had grown since the previous day. In addition to the main protest at Huron Church and College, there were protesters near the Wyandotte exit and the intersection of Huron Church Road and Tecumseh Road.

Mr. Leschied’s sense was that the protesters would not leave until their rights were restored. However, there was no specific list of demands or agreement amongst them about what it would take to leave. There was no one person or group in charge of the protesters.

The police presence had also grown. In addition to the WPS, Mr. Leschied saw Ontario Provincial Police (“**OPP**”), Chatham-Kent Police Service, and Lasalle Police Department cruisers. The cruisers were blocking all of the intersections near the protest. He also saw SWAT-like vehicles, which he described as unmarked green Ford pickup trucks with a cab on the back for transporting officers. Mr. Leschied said he believed these were either RCMP or OPP vehicles, because he has never seen any similar WPS vehicles.



Mr. Leschied observed law enforcement taking photos of the protest. He also saw drones flying above the protest, which he assumed were flown by law enforcement. There were tactical squad members in full gear on the scene. It seemed to Mr. Leschied that an authority higher than the WPS was handling the situation.

[A map depicting the location of the protesters and the police from February 9 to the end of the protest is attached as **Appendix “D”**.]

*Thursday, February 10, 2022*

On February 10, Mr. Leschied arrived at the protest area at approximately 9:00 p.m. He noticed cement barricades on every intersection on Huron Church Rd. up to Tecumseh Road. Vehicles were not allowed in or out of the protest area, but it remained accessible by foot.

Mr. Leschied observed that police were using the firehall near College and University as a staging area. There was a militarized police vehicle and either a paddy wagon or school bus that is normally used for transporting prisoners parked there. Several OPP vehicles were parked at another fire station some distance away.

Mr. Leschied overheard a police officer suggest that the demonstrators had proven their point and that it was time to pack up and head home. The protesters remained.

*Friday, February 11, 2022*

February 11 was the last day that Mr. Leschied attended the protest. He observed police encouraging protesters to leave. The continued buildup of law enforcement suggested to Mr. Leschied that police were going to make a move to end the blockade.

*Saturday, February 12, 2022*

Mr. Leschied explained that he did not attend the blockade on Saturday because he expected skirmishes or mass arrests to occur.

Some of Mr. Leschied's friends were present at the protest. They told him that some individuals were shouting slurs at the police. His friends believed these were agents provocateurs and were attempting to antagonize the police into using violence.

Protesters were given the option to leave the blockade area in their vehicles. People on foot were pushed out of the blockaded area by police. Mr. Leschied heard there were arrests, but he said he does not know any of the people who was arrested. According to him, the protest ended after that. He did not hear of any efforts by protesters to return to the POE.



The cement barriers erected by police around the blockade area stayed up for approximately one month after the protest concluded. Mr. Leschied said he has not returned to that area since and has not heard of anyone planning to go back.

#### *Impact of the Blockade on Traffic*

Mr. Leschied said he thought that many commercial vehicles were diverted to other POEs during the blockade, because there was not a lot of traffic on the Ambassador Bridge. The only time there was a lineup on the bridge was on the first night (i.e., February 7). After that, there was no major backup of vehicles at all.

#### Media Portrayals of the Blockade

Mr. Leschied stated that the portrayal of the blockade in mainstream media was inaccurate. For example, the media showed images of traffic stacked up out of the Ambassador Bridge POE throughout the protest, but the bridge traffic was cleared early in the week. The media also suggested that there were transport trucks blocking the bridge, when there were at most four such trucks during the demonstration (as compared to 40-50 civilian vehicles).

Mr. Leschied used to consume some mainstream media until the biases in its reporting became apparent to him. Now, he does his best to seek reporting from all sides and arrive at a conclusion using his own discernment. This was one of the reasons he went to the protest: to see what was happening with his own eyes, rather than read about it from a potentially biased source.

#### Engagement with Other Protesters

Mr. Leschied communicated with other protesters in Windsor via chat apps and text message. These were the same chats that he had participated in over the previous two years.

There were some disagreements between protesters about strategy. For example, some demonstrators wanted to block off the intersection at Tecumseh Road and Huron Church Road and the Wyandotte exit, while others did not. Mr. Leschied was not an active participant in these disagreements. He just heard about them because he was at the protest.

Mr. Leschied also mentioned that any conversations that he may have had with Ottawa protesters indicated that they had no connection to the protests in Windsor. He was not in contact with protesters at other POEs.





## The *Emergencies Act*

Mr. Leschied explained that the declaration of an emergency was completely unnecessary in relation to the Ambassador Bridge protest. Throughout the events, there were more police officers than demonstrators. Law enforcement could easily have brought the protest to an end, if that was their objective.

Mr. Leschied did not see anyone carrying weapons or engaging in violence. In fact, protesters were very cordial: they offered food to anyone who was hungry (including police officers) and kept the protest sites tidy.

Mr. Leschied said he only got second-hand information about the protest in Ottawa. His impression from friends who attended that protest was that it was a peaceful event to celebrate freedom. His friends who reside in Ottawa painted the same picture.

Mr. Leschied explained that in hindsight, it seemed like the use of extreme force – including militarized vehicles – to clear out the demonstrators was intended to create a spectacle to prove that the *Emergencies Act* was necessary. What happened at the Ambassador Bridge ended right before the *Emergencies Act* was invoked. It created a belief that the *Emergencies Act* was necessary to end what was going on elsewhere.

Mr. Leschied was unable to access to his bank account from Friday, February 18 to Tuesday, February 21. He is unsure whether his account was frozen or if this was a glitch.

## Impact of the Protest

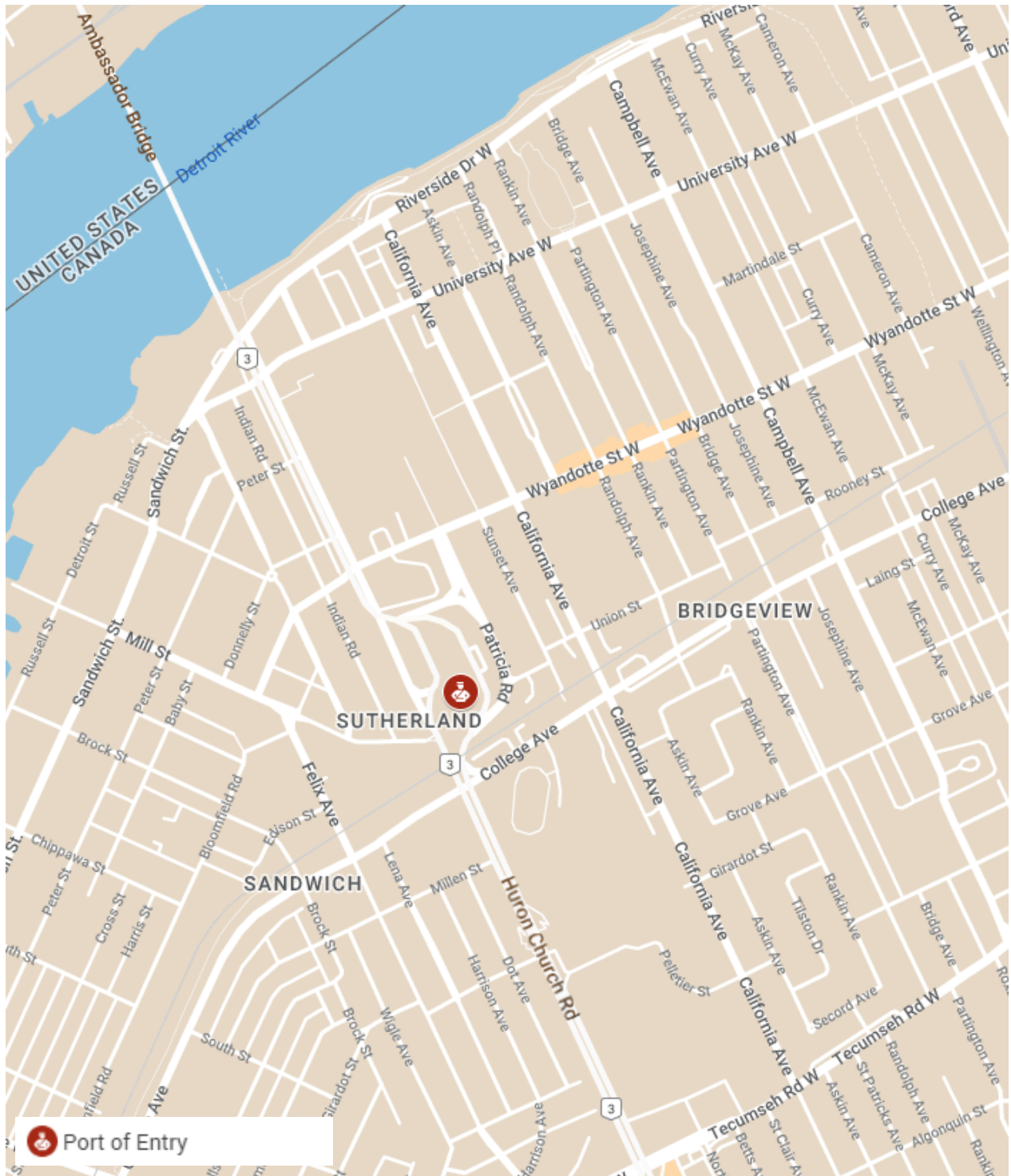
Mr. Leschied was of the view that the blockade brought national and international awareness to the protesters' concerns of about COVID-19 public health measures, which was an achievement. But the blockade did not lead directly to any change in government policy.

He stated that in his view, the government should engage in a dialogue with the public when basic rights and freedoms are infringed, and should have done so during COVID-19 and the protests. If officials refuse to interact with people who feel their voices are not being heard, then protest is inevitable. No one from the government came down to ask the Ambassador Bridge protesters why they were there. The government pigeonholed people into doing this because politicians or public officials are not willing to communicate through proper channels.

Mr. Leschied also noted that certain government officials made denigrating comments in the media about the protesters. It would have been more constructive if someone from any level of government engaged in a dialogue with them.



## Appendix “A”: Ambassador Bridge POE and Surrounding Area







## Appendix “B”: Location of the Protesters, Police, and Tow Trucks on February 7





## Appendix "C": Location of the Protesters and Police on February 8





Appendix “D”: Location of the Protesters and Police from February 9

